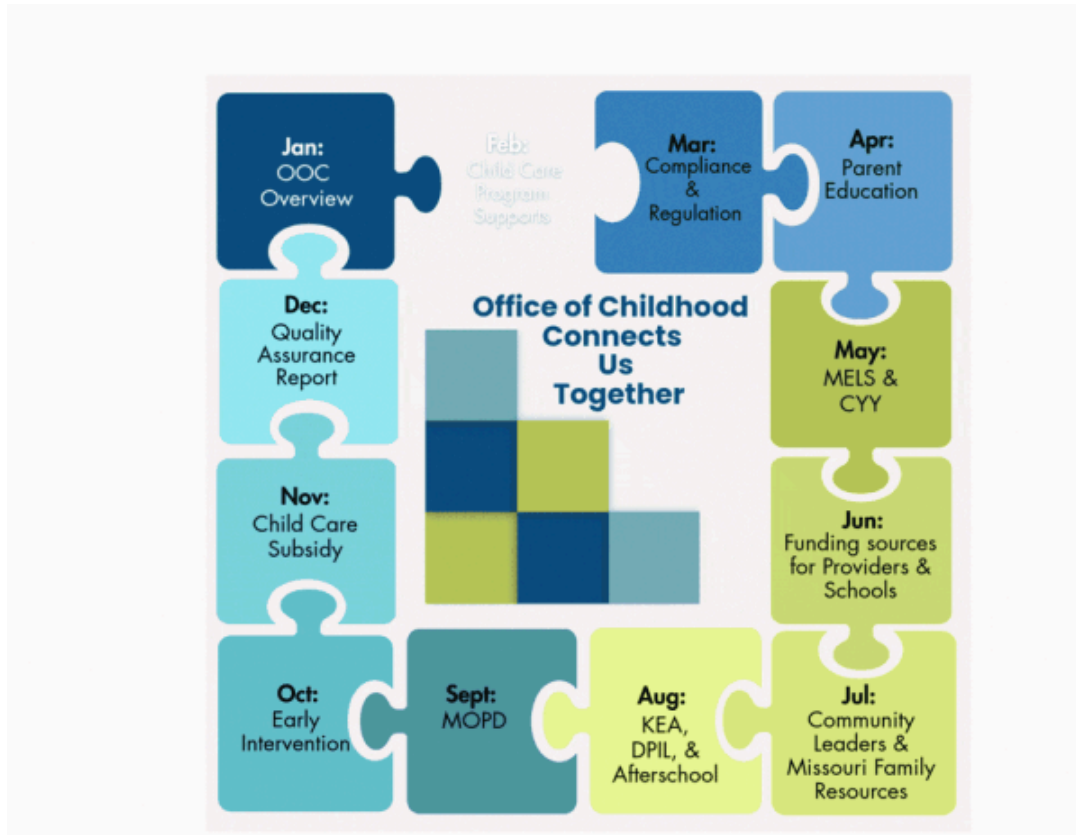




Childhood Connections

February 17, 2026

Office of Childhood Connects Us Together



This year, we are taking a closer look at the Office of Childhood (OOC) by exploring the different programs that work together to support children, families, and early child care professionals across Missouri. In this year's newsletter series, we will spend each month highlighting different OOC programs. OOC is made up of many unique and connected parts and each plays an important role. Together, all these programs are a part of a larger system that supports families statewide. By breaking down each piece, we aim to show how OOC fits together and build a better understanding of the value of our work.



This month we are highlighting a few of the **quality program supports**, which are designed to strengthen early childhood care and education. These quality program supports focus on helping child care providers, educators, and administrators build inclusive, healthy, and nurturing environments where children and families can thrive.

Whether you are looking for hands-on consultation, leadership development, or health and wellness guidance, these programs are here with you every step of the way.

Quality support programs featured in this month's article include:

- Child Care Inclusion Services
- Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Initiatives
- Missouri Supporting Early Childhood Administrators
- Program Support Network
- Child Care Health Consultation program

Read about these amazing programs, what they do, and how they can help you [here](#).

A program support contact list is also available.

NEWS

Child Care Subsidy Waitlist Information



Beginning **March 1, 2026**, Missouri will implement a waitlist for new Child Care Subsidy applications. Helpful information, including a FAQ and flyers for both providers and families, can be found on the [Child Care Subsidy Waitlist webpage](#).

Children in foster care or receiving preventive services through the Children's Division, (defined as a "Protective Services Child" in 5 CSR 25-200) who receive child care assistance will not be placed on the waitlist.

Subsidy Solutions:

Issue: Providers have children authorized to their program who are not enrolled.

Solution: If you have this issue, you can contact CCFamilies@dese.mo.gov to have those authorizations removed from your authorization list.

Webinar Follow-up

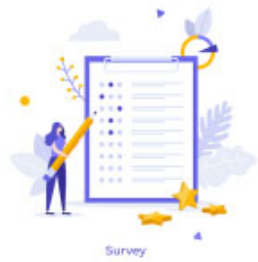


On January 28, 2026, the Office of Childhood (OOC) hosted a webinar and shared general updates from all sections of OOC, an overview of the Child Care Subsidy waitlist, and the Early Learning priority of DESE's Strategic Plan. OOC will be working on its strategic plan this spring, which will align with the DESE plan. The timeline for OOC's strategic plan was shared during the webinar as well.

[Slides](#) and a [recording from the webinar](#) can be found [here](#). Be on the lookout for more communications regarding an outreach event to get stakeholder feedback on OOC's strategic plan soon.

Annual First Steps Provider Survey Results

The Early Intervention team has released the results of the Annual First Steps Provider Survey. [Key findings from the 2025 survey](#) can be found on the Office of Childhood Newsfeed, and the [full 2025 statewide survey results](#) are available online.



New SNAP Webpage



Does your program serve families who receive SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Food Stamps), Temporary Assistance, or MO HealthNet (Missouri Medicaid)? [The Missouri Department of Social Services \(DSS\) has a new webpage](#) available to help families manage their DSS benefits. The page includes:

- Direct links to each benefits portal
- Step-by-step account creation instructions
- Contact information and helpful resources

[A printable flyer is also available.](#) Please share this information with your eligible families!

Updated Missouri WIC Posters



This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

The Missouri Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) is excited to see you at the Conference on the Young Years (CYY) in March! The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) looks forward to updating you on changes in the WIC program and sharing how you play an important role in helping families get the help they need. Please stop by DHSS's booth to pick up a new outreach poster to display in your facilities. The new poster includes a QR code that directs families to a short [online interest form](#) to have a WIC local agency contact them.

If you are unable to see DHSS at CYY in March, you can download and print the [new poster](#) or get one during your yearly inspection.

As always, you can locate information about the Missouri WIC program on the [WIC Community Partners web page](#) or email DHSS at WICInfo@health.mo.gov. Thank you for caring about Missouri's families!

Severe Weather Preparedness Week

Missouri's Severe Weather Preparedness Week is observed **March 2-6, 2026**. The National Weather Service has scheduled Missouri's 2026 statewide tornado drill for Wednesday, March 4, at 11:00 a.m.



Severe Weather Preparedness information can be found at stormaware.mo.gov.

Missourians are encouraged to utilize Missouri's "Ready in 3" program to create a plan, prepare a kit, and listen for information regarding severe weather emergencies.

Grant Opportunities

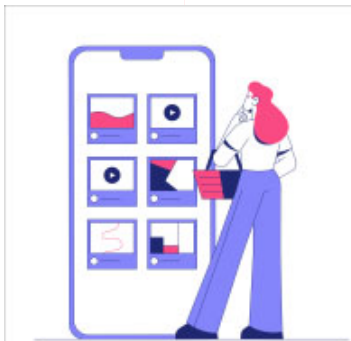
Afterschool Competitive Grant Opportunities



The Office of Childhood's Afterschool Program has two competitive grant opportunities opening in March for school-age afterschool programming. The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) grant and the School Age Community (SAC) grant.

The deadline for applying for both grants is **1:00 p.m. on Friday, April 24, 2026**. Read more about [Afterschool grants](#) on the Office of Childhood Newsfeed or visit the [Afterschool Grants webpage](#) for more information on eligibility, application, and other grant resources.

Funding Opportunity – Innovation Grant to Expand a Child Care Program



Applications for the 2025-2026 Innovation Grant to Expand a Child Care Program are open.

This grant helps licensed and license-exempt child care providers expand their programs in partnership with local businesses or community organizations to meet the growing need for quality child care across Missouri. Eligible applicants with an established partnership can receive up to \$625,000 in matching funds to cover expansion expenses, such as equipment, minor remodeling, and workforce incentives.

Applications will remain open until **February 28, 2026**. For more information, please see the [Innovation Grants webpage](#).

Training Opportunities

Free On-Demand Training



Two series of free on-demand training videos are available on the [Missouri First Steps Training page](#). The Protective Factors training videos by Dr. Dave Schram and the Feelings Friday Trauma-Informed Series support relationship-based early intervention.

Dr. Schram's training provides practical guidance on the Five Protective Factors to strengthen family resilience and child outcomes. The Feelings Friday series offers short sessions on emotional

development and trauma-responsive practices to support regulation and safety.

Nurturing Foundations Learning Series



DESE in partnership with The Missouri Association for Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health - EC (MOAIMH-EC) has announced an opportunity for virtual learning sessions at no cost for Missouri Home Visitors and First Steps Providers.

These sessions begin in February 2026 and end in April 2026. [A link is available on the Missouri Parent Education webpage.](#) A confirmation email, which includes a Zoom link and a calendar hold for the sessions, will be sent to the registrant within 24-48 business hours after completing registration. If you have any questions, contact MOAIMH-EC at info@moaimh-ec.org.

Learning Opportunity Supporting Teen Parents



The Missouri Parents as Teachers Association (MOPATA) has posted a learning opportunity for parent educators, supervisors, and program leaders to join this virtual session focusing on supporting teen parents across Missouri. The date is Thursday, March 19, 2026, from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. For MOPATA members, it is a free offering. For non-members to attend, it is \$40.00.

[A link to this information is available on the MOPATA webpage.](#)

QAR Program Highlights



OOC would like to congratulate the following child care programs that have achieved a quality designation. Programs recognized represent a shared vision for what every child in Missouri deserves regardless of age or setting.

Demonstrating Quality:

- North Callaway County R-I School District
- Belton School District

Exhibiting High Quality:

- Ozarks Technical Community College Nursery
- Jefferson College
- Kirksville R-III School District
- Ozark Area Community Action Corporation – Nixa

- Ozark Area Community Action Corporation – Bolivar
- Ozark Area Community Action Corporation – Hollister
- Ozark Area Community Action Corporation – Stewart

The Quality Assurance Program (QAR) highlights child care programs across the state that have achieved quality designations. Designations focus on strong teacher-child interactions, effective program structure, professional standards, inclusive practices, and family engagement. [For more information, visit the QAR webpage.](#)

MOPD Monthly Tip



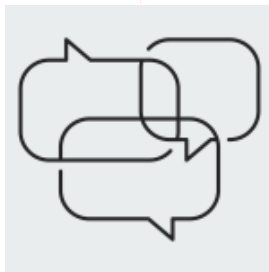
Your MOPD account is just for you—please do not share your login details with anyone else. This helps protect your information and follows the [MOPD Data Privacy and User Responsibility Agreements](#) that everyone agrees to when using the system. Your employer can check your training records using their account associated with the employer.

Job Vacancies



The OOC is hiring and we would love to have you join our team! Click [this link](#) to see open positions.

We Want To Know



Share your stories with the Office of Childhood!

[Submit news and updates about Missouri Early Care and Education!](#)

Or email OOCOutreach@dese.mo.gov.

Miss Something?

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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